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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a conceptual overview of a sociohistorical method used to teach a course on ethnicity to college students. It also describes implementation and student assessment of the team-taught course. The first part of the paper describes the approach, which was directed toward an increased understanding of ethnic history through the use of sociological concepts. The model used to teach the course incorporated three questions: Where does society stand in human history and how is it affected by the historical period? What is the nature and structure of a particular social order? and What is the meaning of humanness in a particular period and what sort of people prevail in that period? The model also takes into account how assimilation, pluralism, segregation, and militancy affect the minority members' concept of their ethnic identity, community, and culture. The second part of the paper focuses on implementation of the approach. To reach the goals generated by the sociohistorical method a basic text/lecture approach was supplemented by an independent research project for the 14 students in the class. Some of the questions that appeared on different examinations are provided as an illustration of the approach and content of the course. The last part of the paper discusses the students' assessments. Students found that materials and information in the course helped them conceptualize society and change; felt positive toward the sociohistorical approach; and believed that the course changed their assumptions about race and ethnic relations in the United States. (NE)

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Clarifying the Concepts of Ethnicity, Community, and Culture

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At
The Annual Meeting of the
American Historical Association

Los Angeles
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In the summer of 1980 I was one of the two sociologists participating in Professor Vecoli's NEH Seminar on Immigration. When I returned to my home campus I was eager to incorporate the lessons of that summer's work into my own classes. Over the eight week period spent at the University of Minnesota I developed a renewed appreciation for the importance of comparative history in the development and testing of sociological concepts. The method had been fruitfully used by many of the classical sociologists to develop concepts and generalizations about social reality. However with the shift towards empiricism, survey research and statistical methods, comparative history began to play less of a role in the development of theory. This has been more evident a trend in American sociology than in the work of European and Third World sociologists.

In the spring of 1981 I was scheduled to teach a course in racial and ethnic minorities. This was an opportunity for me to put my NEH experience to work. During the fall I had several conversations with Professor Allsup about sociology and history. We seemed to agree that each discipline offered some promise for the development of the other and that students would benefit from experiencing their simultaneous interplay. A lesson learned at Minnesota was that historians think differently than sociologists. This, I feel, is due partly to the implicit orientations that each discipline has to understanding social facts. Because we do tend to touch each other in those implicit or domain assumptions, I believed that it was important to have the historical perspective presented by a historian and not a sociologist. Professor Allsup and I thus agreed to team-teach the ethnicity course the following semester.

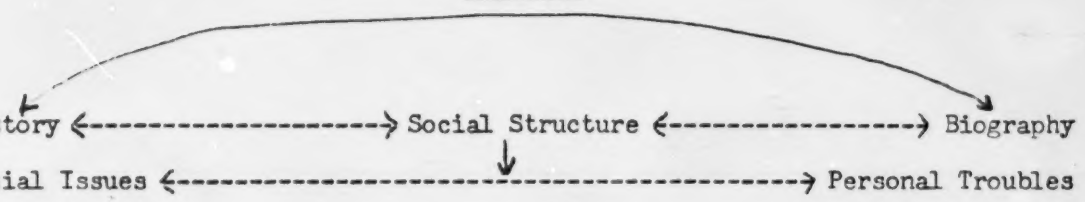
Conceptual Overview

The approach that we used was sociohistorical. We were attempting to incorporate what C. Wright Mills called "The Promise" of social science in general and sociology in particular. The promise is realized through the development by scholars and students of the sociological imagination. This

quality of mind presumes that neither the life of an individual or the history of a society can be properly understood without understanding them both.

To implement this orientation in scholarly work involves raising and simultaneously considering three general questions. One, where does the society stand in human history and how is it affected by the historical period. Two, what is the nature and structure of a particular social order. Three, what is the meaning of humaness in a particular period and what sort of people prevail in that period. By focusing on these questions we are also able to examine the relationship between the social issues of a period and the private troubles of individuals living at that time (Mills: 1959). The general model we used for the course incorporated these elements and is presented diagrammatically below.

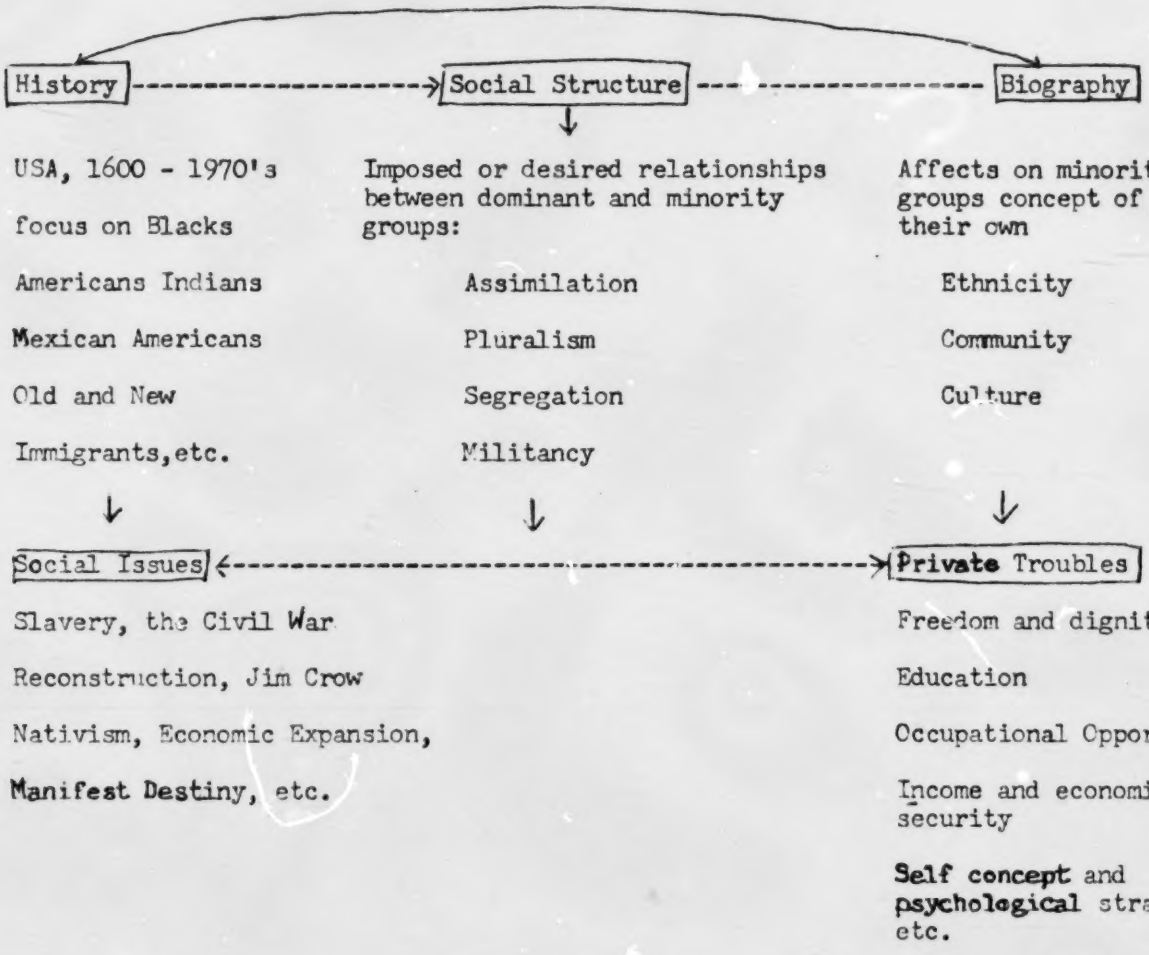
Figure 1



The application of this model to race and ethnic relations involved the definition and specification of each of its major elements. The historical period of interest extended from the 1600's to the late 1970's. Our emphasis was on major historical events (social issues) and their impact on racial and ethnic minorities. We believed that effects of the major social issues would be mediated through social structure and define the relationship between dominant and minority groups. This would give rise to four model relationships between host and minority: assimilation, pluralism, segregation and militancy. Each of these relationships, in turn, would affect the biographical content of members of the dominant and minority groups. Our emphasis was on minorities so we focused on how each of these adaptations would affect the minority mem-

bers concept of his ethnic identity, community and culture. An overview of the full working model is presented in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2



As suggested by Figure 2 our concern was on how social issues affected the relationships or adaptations between dominant and minority groups and how these adaptations in turn were expressed in the life ways of the minority group members. The situation is dynamic in several respects. At different points in history different adaptations prevailed between a given minority group and the dominant society, e.g., segregation followed by assimilation then pluralism. In turn, the adaptations influence the life chances of the minority and effects perceptions of their culture, ethnicity and community. At the same time, or as

another influence on minority opportunity, historical events imposed themselves on the established relationship between the minority groups and the dominant society; e.g., the demands of World War II opened the American economy at levels minority groups, in general, had never experienced. We also could compare different historical experiences of minorities based on similar historical goals of the dominant group, e.g., the exploitation of the ex-slave in the south, and the exploitation of the Mexican and Mexican American in the southwest. The influence of a social structural adaptation on life changes and personal problems was also of interest: what problems do people have assimilating, living in a segregated or pluralistic society, etc. What problems did the interplay of historical forces and social structural arrangements produce for different people during specific periods.

Implementation

To reach the goals generated by the sociohistorical method we decided to use a basic text/lecture approach supplemented by an independent research project for students. The class was small (n = 14) and one professoe was responsible for each class session. However, each professor attended the lecture of the other. We believed that this would stimulate discussion and show students the gaps and points of convergence in our perspectives. It also aided in illustrating the difficulty in generating adequate concepts and theories which integrated the experiences of minorities in the United States.

Course readings and discussion developed around three core works. The third edition of James W. Vander Zanden's, American Minority Relations was used for conceptualization and definition of the sociological dimensions of the course. This work is particularly useful because of its in-depth treatment of the diverse socio-structural arrangements that emerge between dominant and minority groups, as well as the adaptations that minorities make to these arrangements. Through lecture many of the concepts were elaborated and new models presented

(e.g., Internal colonialism).

Dinnerstien, Reimers and Nichols' work, Natives and Strangers provided the students with a limited but useful overview of ethnic history from the colonial period to 1977. Dr. Allsup augmented this text with detailed discussions of the group experiences of Blacks, Mexican Americans, American Indians, and Puerto Ricans, among others.

The experience of the new immigrants and the rise of the new ethnicity was developed using materials from Michael Novak's controversial Rise of the Unmeltable Ethnics. At the conclusion of each module sociological concepts were applied to the historical data for purposes of greater description, comparison, and explanation. A detailed course overview describing the topics of discussion and readings is found in the appendix to this paper.

The approach and content of the course may be further illustrated by examining some of the questions that appeared on the different examinations. The table below contains some typical questions from the four examinations.

Examination #	Question	Assignment
One	Define and differentiate between a minority group and an ethnic group. What is the foundation of minority group inequality? Name and define the types of minorities discussed by Vander Zanden.	VDZ 1-3 DNR 1-3
	Describe in detail the processes that come into play in the emergence and stabilization of racism and nativism. Include in your answer the significant differences between nativism and racism, as well as the gains which the dominant group realizes from these oppressive ideologies.	Lectures module #1
	Discuss the major differences between the experiences of Blacks and Indians in North America from 1607 to 1850. Briefly describe the attitudes of the British Americans towards these groups and the institutions which reflected those views.	

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Two	Define assimilation and briefly discuss the major stages in the process. In light of the model discuss the differential assimilation of Poles, Irish, Germans and Mexicans. What major difference is assimilation between these groups?	VDZ 6,8,9 DNR 4,5,6,7
	Compare and contrast the notions of the Melting Pot, Americanization and Cultural Pluralism as different strategies of assimilation. What is the association of these orientations to the experiences of racial minorities, the old immigrants and the new immigrants.	Lectures module #2
Three	Compare the history of Blacks and Mexican Americans from the latter part of the 19th Century to the 1970's. Explain the political, economic, social and cultural development of these people in terms of white society's response to "peoples of color" and minority reactions to those responses.	DNR 8,9,10
	Describe the evolution of official Indian policy by the federal government. How does the policy reflect the control and power exercised by the dominant group?	Lectures module #3
Four	Present and criticize Novaks argument on the relationship between pluralism and coalition. Is ethnicity a workable foundation for a class movement against the WASP establishment or is it a tool of the capitalistic class to divide the working class against itself. Defend your position sociologically and historically.	Novak complete Lectures module #4

It should be obvious from the above that our approach was directed towards an increased comparative understanding of ethnic history through the use of sociological concepts.

Student Assessments of the Course

Prior to the final examination we asked students to complete a course evaluation which solicited their reaction to our approach. These evaluations were returned to the departmental secretary and not read by either of us until after the grading of the final examination. Four of the items from that evaluation are directly relevent to this discussion.

We querried the students as to whether they found materials, information,

and theoretical orientations in the course which allowed them to more effectively analyze society and social change. From the twelve students that completed the course we received back eleven evaluations. Ten of the eleven believed that the perspective used produced an improvement in their ability to conceptualize society and change.

Among the reactions to the sociohistorical approach itself were the following:

...by relating the sociological terms to actual events they became easier to understand...the combination broadened my understanding.

...the sociology explained why various events in history occurred

...the class provided a sociological perspective along with a historical perspective, each made the other clearer and easier to understand.

No - too abstract.

...the idea of combining the history and sociology made the course more interesting than I thought it would be.

Ten of the eleven reactions to the sociohistorical approach were positive. Although not specifically questioned about the team teaching method that we used, six students responded that it was the aspect of the course that they liked best. One student did criticize the method because of differences in grading expections and policies between the professors and some confusion over assignments. However, on the whole the approach was well received.

We also asked the students if the material covered in the course changed any of their assumptions about race and ethnic relations in the United States. Again, ten of the eleven admitted some change. The most typical changes involved an increased sensitivity to the problems of ethnic groups other than their own, and an expanded awareness by the Chicanos and Blacks in the class that not all white people are alike. (This awareness came primarily from Novaks discussion of the differences between WASPS and PIGs.) Many of the students found Novaks work quite enlightening and a few of the white

ethnics became much more inquisitive about their own history and ethnicity.

The evaluations also revealed that many of the students felt the class to be very demanding, abstract and difficult. However, most (12 of 14) rose to the challange and completed the course. All of the students felt the class was a productive one and many wrote or revealed in later conversations that it was the best in their experience.

In conclusion, Dr. Allsup and I believe that the NEH seminar made a valuable contribution to our teaching and intellectual development. We believe that the disciplined combination of our respective fields based on the seminar initiative resulted in a more comprehensive and effective course in American ethnic relations. We intend to continue using and modifying this methodology in subsequent years.

COURSE OVERVIEW

S335 - Racial and Ethnic Minorities

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Date	Topic	Reading	Lecturer
1/12	Introduction: Course Mechanics, Content and Objectives	VDZ 1	BVJ & VCA
1/14	Some Basic Concepts: Culture, Society, Socialization Components of Minority Group Definition, Types of Minority Groups	VDZ 1	BVJ
1/19	Race: Biological foundations, Major Theories of Race; Race & Culture; UNESCO Statement	VDZ 2	BVJ
1/21	Racism: From Tacitus to Southern White Supremacy	VDZ 3	BVJ
1/26	The Colonial Experience: Contact, cooperation, and conflict; establishment of European domination	DNR 1	VCA
1/28	Development and expansion in the 18th Century U.S.: The South; race, ethnicity, and agriculture	DNR 2	VCA
2/2	Development and expansion in the 18th Century U.S.: The North; race, ethnicity, and agriculture	DNR 3	VCA
2/4	EXAM #1		
2/9	Internal Colonialism: Conflict and Stratification: Blannor's Theory; forms of conflict - Class and Inequality	VDZ 6,8	BVJ
2/11	Assimilation - Pluralism: The Stages of Ass. from Assimiliation to Pluralism	VDZ 9	BVJ
2/16	**Summary and Applications: Social Indicators and Theoretical Models**		BVJ
2/18	**The Land of the Free: Reconstruction and Black America**	DNR 4-7	VCA
2/23	**The Land of the Free: The "Winning of the West"**	DNR 4-7	VCA
2/25	**The Land of the Free: The corporate revolution European immigration, and nativism**	DNR 4-7	VCA
3/2	**Discussion & Application: Differential Assimiliation and accomodations of American Ethnic Groups**		BVJ
3/4	**EXAM #2**		
3/9 3/11	**SPRING BREAK**		

The 20th Century
DNR 8 and 10 (3/16 - 4/1)

3/16	Black Americans: Jim Crow-Black Power		VCA
3/18	American Indian: Defeat, romanticism, and federal policy: Wounded Knee of 1970's		VCA
3/23	Chicano America: Occupied America - the application of internal colonialism		VCA
3/25	Puerto Rico: U.S. Colonialism		VCA
3/30	Japanese America: Success in Anglo-society		VCA
4/1	America, America: A comparison of "people of color"		VCA
4/6	Analyzing Diversity: Structural Condition and Social Psychological Response	TBA	BVJ
4/8	Discussion and Application: Assessing the Progress and Condition of American Ethnic Groups		BVJ
4/13	EXAM #3		
4/15	Ethnic Assertion in the 1970's	Novak 1-4	BVJ
4/20	Intellectuals and the People	Novak 5-8	BVJ
4/22	The New Ethnic Politics	Novak 9-10	BVJ
4/27	**The New Ethnicity**		BVJ
4/29	**Summary & Discussion (White Ethnics and The Minority Movement Problems of Understanding)**		BVJ
5/1	**Summary & Discussion (White Ethnics and The Minority Movement Problems of Understanding)**		BVJ
5/4	**FINAL EXAM**		

REFERENCES CITED

Mills, C. Wright. The Sociological Imagination, Oxford University Press, London 1959